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ABSTRACT

Women are reported to work for the same reasons men do--to provide for the welfare of themselves, their families, or others. Statistics from the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, quoted for white and minority women workers, show that despite unfavorable economic conditions in the first quarter of 1975, an average of nearly 37 million women were in the labor force (working or looking for work) during the year. Of this number, almost 33.6 million were actually employed. Figures are quoted for the marital status of women workers, women heads of families, mothers with husbands present, wives whose husbands are unemployed or unable to work, and for women whose husbands are employed in low-wage occupations. (TA)

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WHY WOMEN WORK

Despite unfavorable economic conditions in the first quarter of 1975, an average of nearly 37 million women were in the labor force (working or looking for work) during the year. Of this number, almost 33.6 million were actually employed. During the decade 1965 to 1975, some 14 million additional jobs were developed in new or expanding industries. These new jobs have provided employment opportunities for more than 9 million women and nearly 5 million men.

Women work for the same reasons men do--most importantly, to provide for the welfare of themselves, their families, or others. This was true of most of the 8.5 million women workers who were never married. Nearly all of the 6.9 million women workers who were widowed, divorced, or separated from their husbands--particularly the women who were raising children--were working for compelling economic reasons. In addition, the 3.1 million married women workers whose husbands had incomes below $5,000 in 1974 almost certainly worked because of economic need. Finally, about 2.2 million women would be added if we take into account those women whose husbands had incomes between $5,000 and $7,000.1/ Forty-three percent of women workers had husbands whose incomes were $7,000 or more.

Among the 4.7 million women of minority races who were workers in March 1975, slightly more than half (54 percent) were never married, widowed, divorced, or separated from their husbands; about one-tenth (11 percent) were wives whose husbands had 1974 incomes below $5,000. In fact, only 1 out of 4 minority women workers was a wife whose husband had an income of $7,000 or more.

1/ The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate for a low standard of living for an urban family of four was $9,838 in autumn 1975. This estimate is for a family consisting of an employed husband aged 38, a wife not employed outside the home, an 8-year-old girl, and a 13-year-old boy.

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The marital status of women workers in March 1975 was as follows:

Marital status	All women		Women of minority races	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	36,507,000	100.0	4,695,000	100.0
Never married	8,464,000	23.3	1,130,000	24.1
Married (husband present)	21,111,000	57.8	2,161,000	46.0
Husband's 1974 income:				
Below $3,000	1,500,000	4.1	251,000	5.3
$3,000 - $4,999	1,633,000	4.5	251,000	5.3
$5,000 - $6,999	2,178,000	6.0	355,000	7.6
$7,000 - $9,999	4,194,000	11.5	514,000	10.9
$10,000 and over	11,601,000	31.8	799,000	17.0
Other marital status	6,932,000	19.0	1,403,000	29.9
Married (husband absent)	1,606,000	4.4	604,000	12.9
Widowed	2,453,000	6.7	357,000	7.6
Divorced	2,873,000	7.9	442,000	9.4

Women heads of families.--Of the 55.7 million families in March 1975, 7.2 million were headed by women. About 3.9 million, or 54 percent, of the women family heads were in the labor force, and nearly two-thirds of these women workers were the only earners in their families. About 1 out of 10 women workers was head of a family. Among the 2.0 million minority women heading families in March 1975, about half were workers. More than 1 out of 5 women workers of minority races headed a family.

Nearly one-third of the families headed by women had incomes below the poverty level in 1974.2/ This was true for more than half of all minority families headed by women. For those families headed by women who worked during 1974, however, about 1 out of 5 (2 out of 5 minority families) had an income below the poverty level. Among families headed by women who worked the year round at full time jobs, 8 percent (15 percent of minority families) were poor in 1974.

Mothers with husbands present.--Of the 21.1 million married women (husband present) who were in the labor force in March 1975, 11.4 million had children under 18 years of age. About 2.2 million of these mothers were working to supplement the low incomes of their husbands. Included

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2/ The low-income or poverty level is based on the Social Security Administration's poverty thresholds, adjusted annually in accordance with the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index. Classified as poor in 1974 were those nonfarm households where total money income was less than $2,495 for an unrelated individual; $3,211 for a couple; and $5,038 for a family of four. (The poverty level for farm families is set at 85 percent of the corresponding level for nonfarm families.)

were 517,000 mothers whose husbands had 1974 incomes below $3,000; 651,000 whose husbands had incomes between $3,000 and $5,000; and 1 million whose husbands had incomes between $5,000 and $7,000.

Among the 1.4 million minority women who were working wives and mothers in March 1975, about 500,000 had husbands whose 1974 incomes were below $7,000. Of these mothers, 105,000 had husbands with incomes below $3,000; 149,000 had husbands with incomes from $3,000 to $5,000; and 229,000 had husbands with incomes between $5,000 and $7,000.

Wives whose husbands are unemployed or unable to work.--In the 46.1 million husband-wife families, there were 2.3 million husbands (some 315,000 minority husbands) who were unemployed in March 1975, although they were in the labor force and actively looking for work; 7.9 million husbands (nearly 736,000 minority husbands) were not in the labor force. Some 1.2 million wives of unemployed husbands and 1.7 million wives whose husbands were not in the labor force were working or seeking work. Many of these women were the sole support of their families.

Women whose husbands are employed in low-wage occupations.--In March 1975 there were 562,000 married working women whose husbands were farm workers; another 728,000 had husbands who were nonfarm laborers; and 1.1 million had husbands employed in service occupations. The median wage or salary income of men in these occupations was low in 1974--$2,940 for farm laborers and supervisors; $2,368 for farmers and farm managers; $5,406 for nonfarm laborers; and $5,695 for service workers (except private household).

Note.--Figures are from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Data for minority races refer to all races other than white. Negroes constitute about 90 percent of persons other than white in the United States. Spanish-origin persons are generally included in the white population--about 93 percent of the Spanish-origin population is white.

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